

Trump's Warsaw speech was a shot in the arm for Poland in its stand-off with Brussels over migration



US President Donald Trump spoke in Warsaw on 6 July before travelling to the G20 summit in Hamburg. [Daniel Falkiner](#) writes that Trump's apparent support for Poland in its dispute with Brussels over the migration crisis risks fostering division among EU member states at a time when talk of a 'multi-speed Europe' is already gaining momentum in Paris and Berlin.

A lot of ink has been spilled already over [President Trump's speech](#) in the Polish capital of Warsaw on 6 July. Much of this has focused on Trump's alleged dog whistles to parts of his base in the United States. But although some of Trump's speech may have been tailored to his domestic audience, his most important message was directed towards the politicians seated before him and even more so to leaders in capitals further west. The new US administration, Trump suggested, has made a firm decision on where its sympathies in Europe lie – and they are not with Brussels or Berlin.

The timing of the speech and the symbolism of its location are dead giveaways in this respect. Trump's visit to Poland came at the end of the [Three Seas Initiative](#) – a joint Polish-Croatian project aimed at strengthening economic ties and political cooperation among 12 countries bordering the Adriatic, the Baltic, and the Black seas – and just before his trip to Germany for the G20 summit in Hamburg. He spoke in the shadow of the Warsaw Uprising monument, which commemorates the heroic struggle of the Polish Home Army to throw off the yoke of Nazi tyranny in 1944.

These facts matter because Poland is currently locked in a bitter dispute with the European Union about alleged Polish backsliding on the rule of law and a controversial EU plan to relocate migrants from Italy and Greece to help share the burden. Together with Hungary and the Czech Republic, Poland still refuses to participate in the relocation scheme, which has prompted the European Commission to initiate legal action against them. There has also been talk that the distribution of EU cohesion funds to Poland could be cut if Warsaw's intransigence continues.

Poland's ruling party, the staunchly conservative Law and Justice Party (PiS), has reacted coolly to these developments. PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski told his party congress earlier this month that the threat to withdraw funds would not force the Polish government to accept migrants, which he had [earlier said](#) would "completely change our culture and radically lower the level of safety in our country." He noted that Poland had never been compensated for its resistance to Hitler and the Soviet empire, drawing on a long-standing trope in conservative Polish political discourse that portrays contemporary Germany and the EU as would-be overlords.

Trump echoed many of these themes in his own speech. Recounting the travails of the Polish people under Nazi and Soviet rule and highlighting the dangers posed by radical Islamic terrorism, he gave tacit support to Poland's position in its migrant dispute with the EU with his declaration that "our borders will always be closed to terrorism and extremism of any kind." Moreover, he said, the people of Poland and America "did not win freedom together, did not survive horrors together, did not face down evil together, only to lose our freedom to a lack of pride and confidence in our values. We did not and we will not. We will never back down."

He followed this nod to Polish nationalists with a clear message to Berlin: "for its own protection – and you know this, everybody knows this, everybody has to know this – Europe must do more. Europe must demonstrate that it believes in its future by investing its money to secure that future." Coming only days before Trump's visit to Germany – whose foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel, [has dismissed](#) Washington's calls for more defence spending as "totally unrealistic" – these comments sounded more like a threat than a firm reminder. It is notable, in this context, that Gabriel was invited to speak at the Global Forum – a major conference in Warsaw taking place during Trump's visit – but not to participate in the meetings of the Three Seas Initiative.

All in all, what Trump's speech was meant to achieve was to hold Poland "up as an example for others who seek freedom and who wish to summon the courage and the will to defend our civilisation." Those "others" include, of course, the Old Europe of France and Germany, whose defence spending falls well below the NATO benchmark of 2% of GDP. However, given the friction between Trump and the leaders of these countries, his praise of Poland was likely tuned more for eastern ears – specifically, those of the leaders of the Three Seas Initiative countries seated before him. It is in them, he seemed to suggest, that his administration sees the true soul of Europe.

Trump's visit to Warsaw bodes ill for US-EU ties and for intra-EU cooperation. There is little doubt that governments in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic will interpret his speech as support for their confrontational stance towards Brussels, particularly on the question of migrant relocation, and as a result they are more likely to maintain it. The EU, of course, will not look favourably on this development, particularly given the acrimony already prevalent in most European capitals over the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement.

And while the Three Seas Initiative may ultimately prove to be a Polish pipe dream, Warsaw is likely to continue to invest its diplomatic energy in pursuing such projects instead of repairing its ties to countries in the west. This is particularly concerning at a time when talk of a "multi-speed Europe" is gaining momentum in Paris and Berlin. As [Angelos Chrysosgelos](#) has argued on EUROPP previously, a split between core and periphery EU countries is very likely to result in greater geopolitical instability while simultaneously decreasing the EU's weight as a foreign policy actor capable of addressing it.

Trump has sown a divisive wind in Warsaw. We must hope that Europe does not one day reap the whirlwind.

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